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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 121568

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SUBJECT: ERITREA: AF A/S CARSON URGES ERITREA TO MAKE
PROGRESS ON SOMALIA AND BILATERAL ISSUES

REF: A. ASMARA 373 B. ASMARA 374 C. USUN 895 D. CAIRO
1787 E. ASMARA 381

Classified By: AF A/S JOHNNIE CARSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a November 16 meeting with Eritrean Ambassador Ghirmai Ghebremariam, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Johnnie Carson rejected Eritrea's (GSE) late October proposal to send a delegation to the U.S. for meetings with senior USG officials. Alternatively, A/S Carson informed Ambassador Ghirmai he would agree to meet GSE officials in Africa or Europe, including Asmara. The Assistant Secretary registered disappointment over Eritrea's inaction following previous US-GSE meetings. Rather than support the Djibouti Peace Process and call for an end to fighting against Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the GSE instead has been working with Egypt and others on an alternate path, which undermines the Djibouti Peace Process and seeks to push the TFG into a relationship with radical Islamic elements. Ghirmai acknowledged that the U.S. and the GSE may not agree on Eritrea's past record on Somalia, but the Ambassador suggested the U.S. focus on recent assertions by senior GSE official's that Eritrea does not and will not support al-Shabaab in the future. END SUMMARY.

No GSE Progress on Bilateral Issues

12. (C) As in earlier interactions with Eritrean officials, A/S Carson noted USG interest in forming a better relationship with Eritrea, but stressed we could not do so unilaterally. Efforts towards improving the relationship must be bilateral and reciprocated by the GSE.

A/S Carson detailed outstanding bilateral concerns, which make relations more difficult now than a few months ago when the U.S. was hopeful about progress from Eritrea. For example, he pointed out that GSE President Isaias was "poorly advised" when he refused to accept Secretary Clinton's call in June. Carson reviewed Eritrean missteps including denial of his own visa since June and failure to accept U.S. Ambassador Ronald McMullen's credentials since 2007, prohibition of U.S. Embassy Asmara's public diplomacy events since August, and detention of Embassy locally engaged staff since 2001. These are areas where the GSE could have, but did not, take positive action.

In the case of the public diplomacy issue, Ghirmai reported MFA Director General (Deputy FM equivalent) Ambassador Petros apologized to Ambassador McMullen for the miscommunication that resulted in National Security Officers blocking an MFA-approved Embassy outreach function. Ghirmai mentioned he planned to travel to Asmara 11/17 and raise the credentials issue during his two-week stay in Asmara.

No GSE Progress on Somalia

¶3. (C) A/S Carson also described "missed opportunities" in which the GSE failed to take action in Somalia as proscribed by USUN Ambassador Susan Rice and others in meetings at the UN General Assembly in September and at the African Union Summit in July. Regarding Eritrean support of al-Shabaab, Ghirmai indicated that the U.S. should focus on Isaias Adviser Yemane's statement to Ambassador Rice that the GSE does not and will not support al-Shabaab in the future. Ghirmai cited statements appearing in the media about al-Shabaab listing Eritrea among future targets as evidence that the GSE does not support al-Shabaab. Ghirmai echoed Yemane's earlier statement at the UNGA that a scenario with al-Shabaab in power in Mogadishu would be destructive for Somalia.

What Clear Action on Somalia Means

¶4. (C) Ghirmai asked how the U.S. and Eritrea could work together on Somalia in the future. A/S Carson suggested a number of actions Eritrea could take in support of stability in Somalia, underscoring the powerful impact of such actions. A/S Carson encouraged the GSE to publicly:

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- State that peace in Somalia is important for the people of Somalia, for the region, and for Eritrea.
- Support the Djibouti Peace Process and the TFG.
- Urge all states in the region to support the TFG and African Union peacekeeping forces (AMISOM).

¶5. (C) COMMENT. As the UN sanctions process moves forward, Isaias is looking for ways to appear more helpful in Somalia. Eritrea's twice proposed and twice rejected offer to send a delegation to the U.S. sends an unambiguous signal to the Isaias regime and underscores the need for positive action on Somalia from Isaias' government. END COMMENT.
CLINTON